

MICHIGAN MAN NEWSLETTER

MARCH 1, 2004

Welcome to March, or eternity, as it's referred to up north. We prepare to settle in for a variety of weather, ranging from more blizzards, to idyllic and gentle rain showers, to a brown crust that sits on top of melting snow, to seventy degree days when we are shooting hoops and digging the ball out of snow banks or practicing sand wedges out of still frozen bunkers. Every day brings us a little closer to seeing the flags out on numbers two and three along the road at Mulligan Hills Golf and Hunt Club and my official first day of summer. Henceforth, I've decided to skip spring and move from indoor basketball and snow shoeing right to golf.

Actually, March is a wonderful month and as of the first Mrs. Ridley and I will celebrate twenty four years of wedded, er, uh...bliss..yeah...bliss. They say a man is not complete until he is married and then ... he is finished. .. er, yeah...uh...bliss. Wedded bliss. Honestly, I have somehow or another ended up with a maker of small miracles, an artistic diva of home and hearth, the mother of two wonderful sons, and the inspiration and motivation of a career that takes more than myself to manage. She has been, to paraphrase the poets, the love of my life and I am truly blessed for it.

Well, this month brings more than the annual dinner/date, the dreaded Ides of March and a world laying anxiously dormant (oxymoron?) in a softening brown and severely off-white paste. It brings the number one drinking holiday in America. St. Patrick's Day. Please don't take that as a derogatory mark against the Irish or any of the Irish-for-a-day faithful, but any holiday that finds scores of excited imbibers lined up to get into pubs at seven a.m. has a few problems built into it. That being said, let's get on with the theme. The wearin' of the green.

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The (World's Last) Unicorn
with apologies to Shel Silverstein and Ted Nugent

A long time ago when the earth was green,
there were more kind of animals than you have ever seen
They'd run around free while the earth was bin' born
but Ted Nugent killed the last Unicorn

He's got a stuffed alligator two Canadian geese
a trophy buck and Big Horn sheep
a grizzly bear and one silly horn
he pulled off the world's last unicorn

Well, Ted was out hunting with his friend Fred Bear
Ted said "Fred, what's that ugly animal over there?"
Fred said "I have no idea but I gotta hunch

we should kill it and eat it for lunch!!”

They had Unicorn sandwiches and Unicorn steaks
filet of Unicorn and it tasted just great
Some Unicorn on the cob and one silly horn
they pulled off the world’s last Unicorn

He’s got a stuffed alligator, two Canadian geese
a trophy buck and a Big Horn sheep
a Grizzly bear and one silly horn
he pulled off the world’s last Unicorn

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Limerick One

A one-eyed old painter, McNeff
Was color blind, palsied and deaf
When asked to be touted, the critics all shouted
This is art with a capital “F”

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More on Snowshoes

Since I wrote last I have delved into snow shoeing with a vengeance. I knew that with this amount of snow I better find some redeeming qualities so I made an effort to get outside at least once or twice a week for some trips. I even surprised my wife with a new pair of snowshoes on Valentine’s Day. I think I’ve finally come round the corner from that time I bought her a Sears Kenmore vacuum cleaner for Mother’s Day or that kite I purchased for her birthday some years ago.

Anyway, my good friend Mitch from Dick O’Dow’s was up and we returned to the sink holes south of Onaway. It was just as beautiful and Mitch found one more activity to add to his aerobic lifestyle. The Alaskan snowshoes were as tall as he was but he managed well and picked up the technique adeptly and quickly. However, Mitch hadn’t much experience driving on northern Michigan back roads during winter. We both got our first lesson on using a snowshoe as a snow shovel. After a twenty minute exercise, plus some transmission rocking and rolling we made our way into the Pigeon River State Forest. Not enough snow had been plowed to even risk parking or pulling over. So Mitch got a feel for road hunting without the guns and beer.

Later that week I found a spot not far from my house. It’s all part of the Little Traverse Conservancy, a trust that buys up undeveloped land for posterity. Funny, it was my first foray onto the trust and I am suddenly keen on seeing more land turned over to keep pristine forests and woodlands for the future generations. Boy, am I starting to sound like a tree-hugger? Back to the trail. I found my way to a

nearby tract and took a trail that crossed a footbridge over the Pigeon River and then wound into a mile loop that boasted beautiful ridges overlooking the river then down into the cedars along the banks then back up and leisurely return to the truck. I mention this because most snowshoe trails are laid out as a loop. Well, my next jaunt came in the form of the North Country Trail in the Wilderness State Park up north of Cross Village. (www.northcountrytrail.org) A fine educator and avid hiker from our school district took my phone call in his class and was more than happy to give me instructions on how to find the path. It is not readily visible nor blatantly marked out. I think this is a liberal conspiracy to keep Type A personalities and Republicans from over running the place.

“About an hour in and an hour out,” Tom informed me.

I found the insertion point (liberal and clandestine jargon for trailhead) and strapped on my shoes. The North Country Trail is actually a four thousand mile project that begins in North Dakota and extends across Minnesota, Wisconsin through Michigan and then down into Ohio, Pennsylvania and terminates in New York. With four thousand miles to cover, loops are not part of the master plan. So my walk an hour in and an hour out (my bad) turned into a two and half hour straight shot with vistas overlooking Lake Michigan, hills and hardwoods, ridges and valleys and of course, no loop. I came out a good two or three mile walk (by road) away from my truck. After marching one way a few hundred yards, I turned two or three more times making an about face heading back the other way before I finally established just where the hell I was. I probably looked like a security guard for the Emmet County Road Commission’s most desolate section of MacAdam this side of the bridge. I was still thinking I had somehow done a loop and my truck was just around the corner. Let’s see. My checklist for hiking and snow shoeing. Food, water, compass and common sense. It seems I had forgotten all four. Imagine that! Fortunately, my trek back was along the Lake Michigan shoreline through the dunes at Sturgeon Bay. Pretty, but ominous as I saw gun metal gray skies gathering in a blow that would knock me back into next week. Let’s say, I quickened my pace. Coincidentally, as I was double timing my way through the snowdrifts and dunes my cell phone rang. I know, shame on me! It was the host of Michigan Out of Doors returning my call. I had suggested doing a show on snow shoeing. Now, imagine my embarrassment. I suggested that maybe road hunting without guns or beer would be a good topic. Now that would be novel.

That trip behind me I was able to get out a few more times with my wife and my son these past few weeks. My neighbor has a forty acre tract behind us that would sure look good on the roster of the Little Traverse Conservancy. (www.landtrust.org) Now that's a loop and we have taken it several times and it still strikes me as funny that I can drive all over northern Michigan looking for that breath taking view and then right in my own back yard. Well, you know what they say. It was there all along. Just beautiful. In spite of the rain that is falling as I write, we have enough snow in the woods to give us another few days of snow shoeing then it’s time to glob on the urethane for the summer and hope they don’t crack next January!

Just another note on snowshoes. We have wooden ones. Specifically, Iversons from Shingleton in the upper peninsula. Aluminum ones by Atlas and Tubbs, Red Feather and more seem to be the trend, but short hikers like us? Wooden framed

snowshoes with neoprene or rawhide lacing look more like cabin art and, well, they look great hanging on the garage wall all summer. Makes the prospect of a long winter a whole lot more tolerable.

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Schedule

MARCH

Wednesday

March 17

12-4 O'Toole's in Novi

7-11 O'Toole's in Royal Oak

Thursday (every Thursday)

Dick O'Dow's in Birmingham

Fridays,

March 5 Hoops in Auburn Hills 10-1

March 12 Doherty Hotel in Clare 10-1

March 19 Hoops in Auburn Hills 10-1

March 26 Oscars in Midland 9-12

Saturdays

March 20 Hoops in Auburn Hills

March 27 Perry Hotel in Petoskey

APRIL (April is not done yet so stay in touch via e-mail or visit www.mikeridley.com)

Thursdays at Dick O'Dow's in Birmingham

Fridays at the Perry Hotel in Petoskey

Saturdays

April 3 Perry Hotel in Petoskey

Hopefully, all the back issues of the Michigan Man Newsletter will soon be available at www.mikeridley.com. Thanks again to webmaster John Kerr. Fine job!

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Limerick Two

An amoeba named Sam and his brother

Were having a drink with each other

In the midst of their quaffing, they split their sides laughing

And each of them now is a mother

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

I played a few new places this past month. The first was the Buckhorn Inn in Trout Lake. What a great crowd! "All MY Exes Live in Rexton" was a big hit! I love the U.P. anyway so it was like going home. NASCAR and snowmobiles. They literally wear their hearts on their sleeves. I hope to be back there this spring and summer so stay tuned.

Leap year!! I played at Paul's Pub in Johannesburg just a few miles east of Gaylord. Another nice crowd and a chance to see some friends I had not seen since the old days at the Torrey Inn in the early and mid-eighties. Another wonderful time!

I met a lot of nice folks in Harrison at their Chamber of Commerce dinner at the Budd Lake Steakhouse. Seems to be a mecca for sledders and ice fishermen!! See? I'm not the only nut who has found redemption in winter!

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Stress Management Techniques (Take a deep, gentle breath and relax)

Picture yourself near a stream. Birds are softly chirping in the crisp, cool mountain air. Nothing can bother you here. No one knows this secret place. You are in total seclusion from that place called "the world." The soothing sound of a gentle waterfall fills the air with a cascade of serenity. The water is clear. You can easily make out the face of the person whose head you're holding under the water.

Ahh, if it weren't for stress I'd have no energy at all.

And you thought I moved up here to get away from all that crap. well, nothing brings out stress like politics so here we go.

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ROCK THE VOTE!!

It's been said that the first casualty of war is the truth. That's not necessarily the truth. It's the moderates in the middle trying to make peace that get used as target practice. They are the first casualties. So enters yours truly.

You think I would've learned a lesson in 1974 when our team went out to a nightclub after a road game. One of my mates was dancing with a local girl and soon a scuffle ensued. It moved outside and as lines were being drawn and sides picked one of the combatants for the other team broke the rules laid out by the Marquis of Queensbury and produced a shotgun. He was aligned directly across from me in the battle formation and being the diplomat I stood slightly ahead of the other guys trying to make my point heard above the din of epithets. The barrel of the shotgun suddenly assumed the circumference

of a four inch cast iron pipe. It looked that big. It is in those moments that you redefine your purpose, your mission in life, maybe God's infinite plan and the part he wishes you to play in this brief theater of the living. All you can think while trying to maintain a reverent relationship with your Maker is, "How can this shit be happening to me?". God bailed me out, in the form of another warrior running full speed from my blind side, laying a hay maker on my noggin, essentially eliminating me from the competition. Blessed are the peacemakers for they are the first to hit the deck. Let's give a little credit to Darwin as I temporarily slid down the food chain coming out of the fracas with a bumped and bruised ego. But I survived. Blessed are the haymakers...

Alas, I didn't learn. Consequences may never again present themselves so severely but I can't help sticking my nose in the middle of a discussion and offer up my services as a moderator. Pow! Right on the schnoz!!

The political season is upon us and probably the most disturbing aspect is how polarized we are as a nation. It's not that I think strong beliefs are bad, but to the point of mania is downright scary. I suppose polarity and strong feelings are necessary during a war and I heard that was the emotion you held for your enemy, not your countrymen. It seems that this war on terror and the hunt for Osama bin Laden would keep everybody somehow on the same page. I am not enjoying the absurd behavior of our leaders and potential leaders. Partly because I have seen the behavior it produces in the Common John, the everyman (or woman) who suddenly spits forth with vile curses on those of opposite viewpoints. I see so much back biting and so little room for discussion. Maybe that's where I see my role. Someone in the middle who enjoys stirring up either end of the spectrum. It's something like being a double agent. You know enough about each side's position that you can offer up rebuttals without getting emotionally involved and as soon as the rhetoric becomes too heated just move to the table where the Democrats drink their coffee and start all over.

. I listen to some of the talk show demagogues who seem to be very talented and well spoken but they definitely cast their pearls of wisdom from a prepaid pedestal. It simply reflects the demographics of those that pay the bills. Preaching to the choir, as it were. They invite debate and when a stray wanders into the fray they ambush the poor sucker by using his platform as a trampoline, bouncing all over the place while the caller sputters on the other end trying to get his point across, which he will never accomplish because it isn't his ball, his court, and in this land of freedom, it isn't even his game. It is not designed as a forum for public discussion. It's entertainment and is only there to reinforce what listeners by in large, already believe.

You see, we live in an era where everybody has there own agenda and a highly sensitive "me" knob and their motto is "You're either with me or against me" and if you remain neutral, you are the first casualty. Oh, the life of a moderate double agent.

So, read your editorials, watch the different spin zones and talk shows. Do your best to come up with an intelligent decision and if you somehow feel that there are "clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am.." Just duck.

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Thanks for your support and again, pass this along. I hope to see all of you sometime

soon and as summer approaches I'll accept no excuses if I'm playing somewhere nearby
and you don't stop by to say hello.
Until April. Best Wishes.

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This issue brought to you by little leprechauns.